

Critical Notes

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE PESHITTA

The question of authorship of the Peshitta is still confronting biblical scholars. Was it made by one translator or by several? Is it a work of Jewish or of Christian origin? No definite solution of these problems have as yet been reached. While scholars almost unanimously agree that the Peshitta is a work of many hands,¹ they are quite at variance as to whether it owes its origin to Jews or to Christians or to both.

Passing over the uniform voice of the Syrian traditions regarding the sending of a number of scribes by Abgar, indicating that there were several or more translators of the Syriac Bible, it is only necessary to glance at the character of the various books to find convincing evidence of several or more authors. The display of style apparent in different parts of the version has led to the belief that several persons were engaged in its execution. Eichhorn has adduced various internal arguments to show that different persons were employed in it. It seems that the Pentateuch was translated first. This can be seen from the fact that passages from it found in later biblical books are practically quoted from the Syriac Pentateuch, and unlike the Book of Psalms, which is a free translation, influenced by the LXX,² the Pentateuch is a very literal version. Ezekiel and Proverbs resemble closely the Targums.³ The Minor Prophets are, for the most part, well although freely translated, and exhibit LXX influence⁴ as does also the Book of Isaiah.⁵ The text of Job, although a servile translation, is in parts unintelligible, due partly to corruption from external causes, and partly to the influence of other translations.⁶ The Song of Songs is a literal translation; Ruth is a paraphrastic version, while Chronicles differs from all other books in that it too is paraphrastic and contains Midrashic elements, thus exhibiting peculiarities of the Targums. As a matter of fact, this book did not originally belong to the Syriac canon⁷ and Fränkel, who examined it carefully, conjectured that it was composed by Jews of Edessa in the third century.⁸ If

¹ Perles, *Melet. Pesch.*, pp. 6-8; Prager, *De Vet. Test.*, etc., pp. 13 ff.

² Cf. J. F. Berg, *The Influence of the Sept. upon the Pesch. Psalter*. New York, 1895.

³ Perles, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴ Perles, *ibid.*, and cf. Credner, *De proph. minor. versionis Syr.*; Sebök, *Die syrische Uebersetzung der 12 kleinen Proph.*, etc.

⁵ Barnes, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, II, No. 6 (January, 1901), 186-97.

⁶ Stenij, *De Syriaca libe Jobi interpret. I.*

⁷ Buhl, *Old Testament Canon*, p. 191.

⁸ It is noteworthy that this book contains no interpolations on the basis of the LXX. See *Jahrb. für prot. Theol.*, V, 758.

additional evidence of a plurality of authorship of the Peshitta be needed, it may be found in the fact that Ephraim Syrus, on Josh. 15:28, speaks of those who translated into Syriac ܡܢ ܕܡܬܪܡܢܐ ܕܡܬܪܡܢܐ and Jacob of Edessa speaks of many ܡܬܪܡܢܐ. The precise number being of no particular importance, nor could it, in the present state of our knowledge be definitely ascertained. Roediger² was therefore altogether right in his assertion that it is "für gewiss anzunehmen, dass an der Uebertragung des alten Testaments mehre Uebersetzer Theil haben; denn sie macht in den verschiedenen Büchern nicht selten einen ganz verschiedenen Eindruck."

The next question of importance which naturally arises is: Who were the translators of the Peshitta? Were they Jews, or Christians, or Jewish-Christians? Those who credit the Syrian traditions, which place the origin of the Peshitta in the time of Abgar, with some historical value are somewhat inclined to think that the Peshitta is solely a work of Christian authorship.³ Among those we may mention the Gaon Samuel b. Hofni, Hirzel, Kirsch, Wichelhaus, De Wette, Keil, Gottheil, Margolis, and others.⁴ Their argument is that from the earliest time of which we have available information, the Peshitta has been claimed by the Christians of the various Syrian churches as their version,⁵ and they have used it "from the end of the fourth century down to our own day,"⁶ though Nöldeke⁷ and others assert that the Peshitta has never been used among the Jews.⁸ This argument is rather weak, and

¹ Assemani, *Bibl. Orient.*, I, 305.

² In Ersch and Gruber's *Allgemeine Encykl.*, article "Peschito," sec. 3, XVIII (Leipzig, 1843), 292a-94a.

³ Hirzel, *De Pent. Syr. Versi.*, p. 129; Kirsch, *Pent. Syr.*, p. xiv; Gesenius, *Comm. on Isaiah*, I, 85 ff.

⁴ Perles, *op. cit.*, p. 21; Dathe, *Praef. in Psalm Syr.*, pp. xxiii ff.; Nöldeke, *Die altt. Lit.*, p. 263. Wichelhaus' opinion is not clear. It is doubtful as to which view he favors, since he is not consistent in his statements. Perles (*Melet. Pesch.*, p. 15) calls attention to this fact: "Uno loco (p. 73) dicit ce vix credere, versionem Simplicem a Judaeis scriptam esse quia 'in Talmude proculdubio hujus versionis mentio extaret, si hominis Judaei esset opus. Neque ea simplicitate gaudebant Judaei qua versio Syrorum nitet et emicat' alio vero loco (p. 119) auctore rege Izate in Palaestina factum esse censet. Sed vir in Syriacis doctissimus non satis traditionum Palaestinensium notitia imbutus fuit, ut earum vestigia in Peschitho invenire portuisset"; cf. also the statement of Prager in his *De Vet. Test. Syr.*, etc., p. 19.

⁵ Buhl (*Old Test. Canon*, p. 186) and Nöldeke (*Die altt. Lit.*, p. 265) maintain that the Syrian Christians in Palestine have another version in their own dialect made, very likely, from the Greek. This view goes back to Bar Hebraeus, who divides the Syrians into eastern and western and speaks of the two Syriac versions of the Bible; one, the Peshitta made from the Hebrew, and the other, a paraphrastic rendering, from the Greek. The first he claims to be in use among the eastern Syrians, while the western ones make use of both. See his scholia on Ps. 10:5; 107:4; Isa. 59:16; Jer. 13:9; Amos 5:16; and cf. Götttsberger's *Bar Hebraeus und seine Scholien*. Many Syrian commentators sometimes speak of the two translations as being in common use.

⁶ A. Mingana, in *Exp. Times*, XXVI (May, 1915), 379. ⁷ *Die altt. Lit.*, p. 264.

⁸ This statement cannot be sustained in view of the fact that the Peshitta was known among the Jews. The Gaon Samuel b. Hofni suspected it of being a Christian product, while in a subsequent period we find the Syriac version of the Apocrypha quoted in the writings of Moses b. Naḥman (Naḥmanides) of Gerona, Spain. In his Introduction to

can hardly be proved. Nor can anything positive be argued in favor of Christian authorship of the Peshitta from the fact that the name **ܡܫܝܚܐ** as applied to the Syriac version of the Bible does not occur in Talmudic literature, since its frequent use is not met with before the ninth century. However, certain other designations, such as **ܡܬܪܡܝܢ** and **ܬܪܓܘܡ**, referring to Aramaic versions of the Bible, appear in the Talmud,¹ although it cannot be convincingly proved as to whether a Syriac version is actually quoted.² Others claim that the internal character of the Peshitta goes to prove that it must have proceeded from Christian hands. No use is made of the Targums, which Jewish translators would probably have consulted in making the Peshitta. But this too is a weak argument, since the Peshitta, at least parts of it, antedates perhaps some of the Targums. Besides, there are scholars who actually maintain that the influence of the Targums is strongly felt in some books.³ Perles⁴ noticed it in the Pentateuch, especially in Genesis, Cornill⁵ in Ezekiel, and Fränkel⁶ in Chronicles, while Credner⁷ goes as far as to claim that the Targums were actually consulted in the prophetic parts of the Peshitta. The claim of Gesenius,⁸ Nöldeke,⁹ and others, that the Peshitta was written in the same dialect as was the New Testament,¹⁰

his commentary on the Pentateuch, he mentions the Syriac translation of the Wisdom of Solomon **ܐܪܡܝܐܝ ܗܫܝܚܐ ܡܬܪܡܝܢ ܚܒܬܐ ܕܫܠܡܐ ܘܬܠܝܒ ܒܪ ܐܝܬܐ** (see Perles in *MGWJ*, VII [1858], 147, and cf. his *Melet. Pesch.*, p. 6), while in the Preface to his commentary on Deut. 21:14 he quotes the Syriac version (**ܡܢܠܬ ܫܪܫܢ**) of Jth. 1:8-10 (see Neubauer, *Book of Tobit*, p. xiv). The claim of L. Zunz "dass die bei Nachmani erwähnte **ܡܢܠܬ ܫܪܫܢ** ein nicht näher bekanntes, verlorenes Werk sei" (*Gottesd. Vortr. d. Juden*, pp. 122 f.) was refuted by an anonymous critic (Rapoport) in **ܟܪܡ ܗܡܝ** VI, 256-59.

¹ Cf., e.g., Yer. Sabbath, 16, Hal. 1; Megillah 3a.

² Prager, *op. cit.*, p. 18 and p. 19, n. 3.

³ A. Mingana in *JQR*, VI (N.S.), 387 ff.

⁴ *Melet. Pesch.*

⁵ *Ezechiel*, pp. 154 f.

⁶ *Jahrb. für protest. Theol.* (1879).

⁷ *De prophetarum minorum versionis Syr.*, etc., pp. 107 ff.

⁸ In the Introduction to his *Commentary on Isaiah*, pp. 85 ff.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 264.

¹⁰ On the strength of this assumed dialectical similarity between the Peshitta and the New Testament, scholars have advocated the theory that "the dialect of the Peshitto, even as it stands now, represents in part at least that form of Aramaic which was current in Palestine" (Westcott, *Canon of the N.T.* [1886], p. 205; [1896], p. 241). When the Peshitta of the New Testament was first printed in 1555, its editor, Chancellor John Albert Widmanstätter, claimed that the Syriac of the Peshitta was the language of Palestine, the vernacular dialect used in the time of Jesus and the apostles. Even such Syrian grammarians as Elias I and Bar Hebraeus reached the same conclusion as Jacob of Edessa, that the Peshitta originated in Palestine (Nestle, in Hastings' *Dict. of the Bible*, IV, 645 f.) and when Prager (*op. cit.*, p. 29) advanced the theory that the Peshitta is a Galilean product, it was at once questioned by Nestle (*Theol. Literaturzeit.* [1876], col. 282). Reifmann (**בית הלמוד**, I, 386 f.) subsequently conjectured that the Targum which Onkelos made into Aramaic according to the instruction of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua (Meg. 3a) is to be identified with the Peshitta. He argues that since western Aramaic is the Syriac language spoken in Palestine, it is obvious that Onkelos, who was a native of that country, made his version in his native dialect. The later Babylonian rabbis translated it into their own Aramaic and made changes and additions in their work which subsequently were commonly attributed to Onkelos. All this is very ingenious, indeed, but hardly

proves little in favor of Christian authorship. Nor can Grünthal's¹ claim that the Syriac translation of Esther, because it exhibits not a trace of Midrashic influence, "gehört unzweifelhaft dem Christentum an,"² receive any consideration. It is doubtful as to whether the Book of Esther was susceptible to such an influence at the time when it was rendered into Syriac. Rather strong is the evidence adduced in favor of Christian authorship from the air of negligence apparent in the rendering of the Levitical laws, particularly in the sections concerning clean and unclean animals, which would scarcely have proceeded from Jewish hands.³ But whatever may be considered as most decisive in favor of a purely Christian authorship of the Peshitta is derived from the interpretation of the many passages which lend themselves to Christian coloring. Thus, for instance, Isa. 7:14, where the Hebrew word *הנה העלמה הרה ויילדת בן וקראת* *עלמה* in the sentence *הנה העלמה הרה ויילדת בן וקראת* *עלמה* is rendered in the Peshitta by the word *ܥܡܬܐ* "virgin," which makes the passage a direct reference to the birth of the Christian Messiah from the womb of a virgin, thus making it conform to the evangelical quotation (Matt. 1:23). But as Mingana⁴ has correctly pointed out, "it is clear that this Semitic term corresponds with the Arabic *غلام* and the Aramaic *ܕܡܬܐ* means simply in the masculine form a *young man* married or unmarried, and, in its feminine form, a *young woman* married or unmarried."⁵

convincing. In the light of the evidence we now possess, this stressing on the assumed Palestinian origin of the Peshitta is entirely untenable. The Peshitta as we have it today is evidently not a Palestinian product. While its Syriac is akin to the Aramaic of Palestine, it is very far from being the same dialect. Syriac is the name given to the Aramaic dialect which was spoken in the Euphrates Valley and the adjoining districts. The dialects formerly spoken in Palestine and in its neighborhood as far north as Palmyra were also dialects of Aramaic, but distinct from Syriac. These western Aramaic dialects differ from Syriac in the use of what may be called the article, in the conjugation and formation of the verb, and in vocabulary (see Mingana, in *JQR*, VI [N.S.], 386 f.). The Palestinian Aramaic is known to us from the Aramaic portions of the Old Testament, from the Targums and other Jewish and Samaritan literatures, from Nabatean and Palmyrene inscriptions; and it is not the language of the Peshitta. While the exact date of its origin cannot be definitely ascertained it is undoubtedly a work of Jewish hands outside of Palestine.

¹ Grünthal, *Die syrische Uebersetzung zum Buche Esther*, p. 18.

² His argument that because the author of the Peshitta made some use of the LXX (pp. 19-20) it goes to prove that it is of Christian authorship is equally absurd. Besides, this view does not quite agree with the opinion of B. Jacob (*Das Buch Esther bei den LXX* [Giessen, 1890]), who, asserts that "von syrischen Uebersetzung steht die Peschittha, was man bei der Lage in andern Büchern nicht erwarten sollte, in gar keiner Beziehung zu LXX. Sie ist eine treue Uebersetzung des hebr. Textes mit ganz, unwesentlichen Abweichungen, in denen sie jedoch nicht mit der LXX übereinstimmt" (p. 7).

³ S. Davidson, *Lectures on Biblical Criticism*. ⁴ *JQR*, VI (N.S., 1916), 389.

⁵ Cf. Prager, *op. cit.*, p. 19, where he points out that the common Syriac equivalent for *עלמה* is *ܕܡܬܐ*. "That this word is taken sometimes exclusively in the sense of a married woman is clear from the following sentence which does not suffer another interpretation (Prov. 39:19): 'There are four things that I know not . . . and the way of a man with a married woman' *ודרך גבר בעלמה*. The four things are evidently cases of an action which leaves no obvious record behind it, the serpent on the rock, the ship in the sea, the bird in the air, and by consequence, the woman alluded to is not a virgin" (Mingana, *loc. cit.*).

It is interesting that the Gaon Samuel b. Hofni considered the Peshitta a work of Christian authorship because the Hebrew word מִטָּה in Gen. 47:31 is translated in the Peshitta by מִטָּהוּ = מטָּהוּ.¹ But here we have a reading decidedly in agreement with the LXX τῆς ῥάβδου αὐτοῦ and cannot be used as evidence in favor of Christian authorship. There are other passages in the Peshitta where distinct Christian influence is traceable, such as Isa. 9:5; 52:15; 53:8; Jer. 31:31; Hos. 13:14; Zech. 12:10, and many more. Such passages are also found in the Psalms, which have in addition superscriptions, undoubtedly of Christian origin, though they possibly embody also some Jewish traditions.² Indeed all of these and other similar quotations would furnish quite reliable proof of Christian authorship, provided we could be certain that they were part of the original version, and not due to subsequent modifications. This, however, cannot be demonstrated, and therefore one cannot possibly assert with any air of definiteness that the Peshitta of the Old Testament is a work of Christian authorship.³

The conjecture that the Peshitta is a work of Jewish-Christians is very likely advanced with the purpose of compromising the two diametrically opposed views which favor either Jewish or Christian authorship. Those who place the Peshitta in the second century, as made for the use of Syrian Christianity, naturally infer it from the extreme scarceness of Hebrew learning in Christian communities at that time,⁴ while those who do not question the genuineness of the christological passages in the Peshitta and desire to make allowances for the Jewish elements in it obviously assume that only Syrian Jews by birth, who, later embraced Christianity, are responsible for its text.⁵ Nöldeke,⁶ who considers the Peshitta a Christian work, finds evidence of Jewish help in its execution. In I Chron. 5:2 the passage "for Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the prince" (מִיָּדָה) is rendered in the Peshitta as follows: ܡܢ ܡܠܚܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚ "from Judah shall come forth the King Messiah."⁷ But such a view implying that the authors of the Peshitta were both Jews and Christians does not seem quite possible; for it is, however, very doubtful as to whether they could have

See Harkavi, *זכרון הג' ר' שמואל בן הפני וספרי* (St. Petersburg, 1880), p. 48, n. 125. "לכתוב וישתחו ישראל על ראש המטה (בראשית מ"ז ל"א) נאמר בפירוש ר' שמואל . . . וכבר העתיקו מעתיקי הנוצרים וישתחו על מִטָּה בחשבם כי המלה היא מטה אשר הוראתה מקל. אולם שתי המלות האלה והוראותיהן שונות".

² Prager, *op. cit.*, pp. 47–66.

³ Cf. Wiseman, *Horae Syriacae*, pp. 100 ff.

⁴ Cf. Euseb. *Eccl. Hist.* i. 6. 16; Jerome *Cat. Script. Eccl. in Orig.*

⁵ Eichhorn, *Einleitung*, etc., II, § 250, 135 f. His view is also shared by Dathe, Hitzig, Renan, and others.

⁶ *Die altt. Lit.*, pp. 262 f.

⁷ But the copyist of Codex F has ܡܢ ܡܠܚܬܐ "has gone out." See Barnes's *App. Criticus to Chronicles*, p. 4.

Richard Simon is among the first to claim that the Peshitta owes its origin to Jews. "It answers in many places almost word for word to the Hebrew text; so that we may easily believe it was rather made by a Jew than a Christian. But as the Syriac transcribers consulted not the Hebrew in the writing of their Syrian version, there have many considerable changes and additions happened. Besides, they have often been mistaken and have left many faults in their copies, which might have easily been corrected without the help of other Syrian copies."⁷ His theory was subsequently

¹ *Melet. Pesch.*, p. 16.

³ It is remarkable that every place where the tetragrammaton occurs in the Old Testament the Peshitta translates it by מְחַיֶּה, which is in accord with the rabbinic tradition to read יהוה as if it were written אֲדנִי (see P'sachim, 50a א"ר נחמך בר אבא . . . יצחק; cf. Kidd., 71a).

⁵ Buhl, *Canon of O.T.*, 69, pp. 187 f.

⁶ See above, note 8, p. 216.

⁷ Simon, *Crit. Hist.*, etc., II, 99.

supported by the following Jewish scholars. Rapoport,¹ Hübsch,² Fränkel,³ Perles,⁴ Grätz,⁵ Prager,⁶ Reifmann,⁷ Bacher,⁸ Heller,⁹ and others, while non-Jewish scholars¹⁰ are not yet agreed in their opinions regarding the authorship of the Peshitta. However, all claimants for Jewish authorship unanimously agree that the Peshitta betrays Talmudic influence, and the Hagadic and Halakic elements are interwoven in it. As a whole it is imbued with the spirit of the religious writings of the Jews, and in the words of Geiger,¹¹ "Sie gibt nicht bloss ein jüdisches Buch wieder, sondern sie fasst es auch vollkommen nach damals herrschenden Jüdischen Anschauungen auf."

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THE ASSYRIAN WORD İKDU

In Delitzsch's *Assyrisches Handwörterbuch* and Meissner's *Supplement zu den Assyrischen Wörterbüchern* this word is entered under the root אכד, while Muss-Arnolt in his *Assyrisch-English-Deutsches Handwörterbuch* gives the word under עקד. Langdon in his *Neubabylonische Königsinschriften* agrees with Delitzsch in taking the root to be אכד, and Streck in his glossary to the Inscriptions of Aššurbanipal follows Muss-Arnolt.

The meaning generally assigned to this word by scholars is "mighty." There are several passages, however, which show that the fundamental meaning of the word is not "mighty" but "angry," "raging," "ferocious." So for example in Sm. 702, 7 (published in Delitzsch's *Lesestücke*³, p. 79) we have the sign BAD with the value *idim*, which equals *ikdu*. In Sumerian *idim* means "raging" (Langdon, *Sum. Gram.*, p. 221). The meaning "raging," "furious" agrees admirably with its use in most Assyrian texts. Thus we have in Tiglath-pileser (VI, 77), *i-na lib-bi-ia ik-di i-na kit-ru-ub*

¹ בכור-השנה (1844), p. 37; ערך מליך, article אחרג, p. 254a; אנרות ש"ר. pp. 43 ff. Cf. הליכות קדם by Gabriel Polak (Amsterdam, 1846), pp. 9-20.

² *Die fünf Megilloth*, p. ix. He advanced the theory that the Peshitta text in our possession is a Jewish revision of an earlier version, made after the fashion of Aquila's revision of the LXX.

³ *Jahrb. für prot. Theol.*, V, 758 ff.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

⁵ *Geschichte der Juden*, IV (3d ed., 1893), 328.

⁶ Prager, *op. cit.*

⁷ בית תלמוד, I (1881), 383-87.

⁸ See his article on the Aramaic languages and literature in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, II, 716 f.

⁹ *Untersuchungen*, etc., *ad seq.*

¹⁰ There are also some Jewish scholars who assume Christian authorship of the Peshitta. Among these may be mentioned Gottheil in his article "Bible Versions" in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, and Max L. Margolis in his *Story of Bible Translations*, pp. 44 ff.

¹¹ ZDMG, XXI, 487; *Nachg. Schrift.*, III, 322; cf. also *Nachg. Schrift.*, IV, 96.